

## EDITORIAL

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## The European Educational Research Association: people, practices and policy over the last 20 years

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From a pragmatic point of view, it is the people who make an organisation, but organisations are both people and structures, and not least organisations develop culture. One of the significant features of the European Educational Research Association (EERA) as an organisation is that many of its activities are run by people on a voluntary basis. Apart from a small office, now in Berlin, which oversees and handles the everyday management, participation on Council, reviewing and programming for ECER (European Conference on Educational Research), managing networks, etc. are all undertaken as voluntary work by academics from across Europe (and beyond). From the large group of people who are currently sustaining these activities, many have participated from the beginning, but many others, after having been once at the conference, returned and got engaged in the work, for instance within one of the networks. Among the many who participate in EERA activities, there is a diversity of reasons for doing so, but there seems to be something which is recurring in what people say about why they do it. One of these recurring ideas is that the discursive norms of the organisation are enforced in the context of welcoming people and ideas, and second, there exists an intellectual generosity and egalitarianism which encourages newcomers to participate rather than protect themselves. We believe that this tells something about what EERA and ECER are about.

Organisational cultures are developed over time. It takes time before dominant ways of acting and behaving become reified and part of organisational structures. We also know that people act and can be made to act in many different ways dependent on the structures provided by a community of peers and through the ways in which this community is organised. As academics we all know something about this, we know about the thrills of being creative and engaged in a research project, of writing and collaborating with fellow researchers. But we also know about boundaries set by our institutions, by funding streams or by hierarchical structures and about exclusion (mechanisms) within our different fields of educational research, currently further enhanced by a culture of competition and measurement (read citation index and impact factor) sweeping over many higher education institutions across Europe. Such structures seem to be built on the idea that competition and measurement are the mechanisms for enhancement of research. Several of the articles in this special issue tell another story of research collaboration and development of organisational structures, a story of recognition and of being included in a research community. We believe this is an important story to be told – because it reflects the development of an organisation which has seen a considerable expansion over its first 20 years.

Another important aspect of EERA's work is how it has addressed the policy of educational research in Europe, and still continues to do so. From the outset, those who were involved in setting up EERA as an organisation thought it important to make an umbrella organisation that could encompass all the different strands of educational research. There were those opposed to this idea, who thought the scope of such a broad organisation was too wide and that their interests were better served in an organisation 'which allows members to share research interests more closely' (Gretler, 2007, p. 176). Thus, for instance, EARLI (the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction) decided not to join EERA, in order to retain its own identity, as recorded from the first founding meetings of EERA (Gretler, 2007).

A second founding meeting took place in Aarau, Switzerland in October 1993 where an agreement to establish EERA was reached. In his article entitled 'International Social Organisation of Educational Research in Europe', Armin Gretler (2007) recounts some of the initial arguments in favour of developing this new umbrella organisation:

- Educational research is at a critical stage of transition from relatively uncoordinated to more coherent activities, intended, among other things, to provide educational research policy makers with a better framework than in the past upon which policy makers can base their decisions. International cooperation is an important element of this strengthening process.
- Every country in Europe has different infrastructures in place for educational research. Countries with weaker infrastructures in this area should be able to benefit from countries with stronger structures. A broadly conceived EERA can play an important role in the related exchange and transfer processes.
- In several countries – France, in particular – education sciences are currently at the centre of an epistemological controversy. EERA could become an important conduit for internationalising such discussions.
- The existing international associations are either specialised in one specific discipline (e.g. psychology) or in one particular area (e.g. adult education). Moreover, there is a need for an umbrella organisation based on a broadly defined, unrestricted concept of educational research.
- The international organisations active in the field of education have a strong need for a discussion partner who can represent the entire field of educational research (this argument was made by the participating representatives of the Council of Europe and the OECD). An umbrella organisation of NERAs [National Educational Research Associations] and SERAs [Specialised Educational Research Associations] [1] could act as such a partner.
- Many SERAs are confined to Western Europe. An EERA should try to also bring Eastern Europe into the fold. (Gretler, 2007, pp. 176-177)

These arguments from the beginning of the organisation continue to be important aspects of EERA's work today. EERA has seen an expansion in terms of more member associations [2], greater number of networks [3] and a larger conference, and this constitutes a different platform for trying to influence policy on a European level today. From the outset there was an idea of connecting EERA more closely to the European Commission, but this was not favoured by the founders (Gretler, 2007). EERA has over the last years engaged in lobbying, especially trying to influence the European Commission and its commitment towards social science and humanities (SSH) in its research programmes. Although differently across Europe, it can be claimed that educational research is also at a critical stage today; thus, having a strong European Educational Research Association, which also promotes communication and collaboration between national associations, is more important than ever. EERA never played a direct role as a provider of research for policy makers; where it seems to have positioned itself is more as a protector of the diversity of educational research.

There is still a diversity of infrastructures for educational research across Europe, although more research is coordinated through collaborations at a European level today. ECER especially seems to provide an important forum for researchers both more nationally oriented and those already operating within different European research networks. Through the conference, and through some of the other activities undertaken (e.g. seasonal schools, seminars, etc.), EERA has developed arenas for networking, for trying out ideas and getting feedback on research, and as such

it has succeeded in creating an important space for many educational researchers across Europe and beyond. The ECER, especially through symposia and roundtables, and the *European Educational Research Journal* (EERJ) are in some way evidence for EERA's contribution in raising epistemological controversies within the educational sciences to a European level. A range of discussions and problematising of developments within educational research has been discussed. EERA, through its activities, does seem to create a space for open discussion, and it also has in the last years, through different initiatives, but especially in relation to the research programmes in Horizon 2020, acted as an umbrella association, representing educational research in Europe.

Thus, EERA has developed a profile from its first intention of establishing an organisation comprised of national European associations of educational research to a combination of an open and discursive space driven to a large extent by self-organising networks and managed by a council of representatives of national educational research organisations as members. It has created an open space of intellectual exchange, of cultivating diversity as a resource, of mutual information and joint collaboration in order to contribute to a process of Europeanisation from the bottom up, making Europe an intellectual habit. It has provided an impetus for an emerging European (educational) research space by using EU political opportunities and financial resources for doing sound, useful and critical educational research on Europe's history, present and future, also placing it within a broader international context.

In this special issue dedicated to the celebration of EERA's 20th anniversary different aspects of EERA are looked at. The authors all have, in some way or another, had a long-standing relationship with this organisation. Thus, through their experiences and perspectives as individual researchers, EERA governance and Council, the networks, the Emerging Researchers' Group (ERG), and the *European Journal of Educational Research* (EERJ), different facets and periods of the life of the association are addressed. Some of the more challenging and critical incidents in the history of the organisation are discussed, and to a certain extent some thoughts are expressed about what lies ahead. But foremost this is an issue to commemorate 20 years of work and participation by a large number of educational researchers across Europe (and beyond). Celebrating and listening to the voices of those who have been involved is also a way to invite more to join the collaboration and the discussions. It is fair to say that EERA has grown stronger over these years, and this issue provides the evidence for this fact, we believe. Hopefully this issue will also allow for more researchers to share the journey undertaken so far and through this become engaged in the future development of the association.

We started the introduction saying that from a pragmatic point of view, it is the people who make an organisation but that organisations are both people and structures and, not least, organisations develop culture. We close this introduction by saying: it is the people who make a special issue, but special issues are both people and knowledge. This special issue contains differentiated, even multifaceted epistemological, theoretical and methodological perspectives on EERA and its present, its history and its possible futures. It would double the content of this special issue if we were to summarise the papers in this collection; therefore, to familiarise themselves with the content of the issue, we recommend that readers look at the abstracts. At the outset our intention as editors was to bring together experienced and emerging scholars who took and still take responsibility, who have been and still are engaged in contributing to EERA and to a diverse communicative culture and to a European educational research space. We expected them to reflect on their experiences and expectations and to share their ideas on processes of Europeanisation in and through educational research with us and a broader audience. Therefore we close this editorial of a special anniversary issue with some comments on the editors and authors.

In a first group of authors we have EERA presidents and treasurers. Sverker Lindblad, Sweden, was the EERA president from 1999 to 2001; Leif Moos, Denmark, held this function from 2009 to 2014; Wim Jochems, Netherlands, was the EERA treasurer from 2005 to 2009; and Theo Wubbels, Netherlands, was the treasurer of the EERA from 2009 to 2013; he will be the president from 2014 to 2018.

Second, we have a group of EERA Council members representing their national educational research association at EERA Council and, at the same time, contributing to the challenges of the Europeanisation and globalisation of EERA and educational research. Gunilla Holm, Finland, represents the Finnish Educational Research Association (FERA); Gyöngyvér Pataki, Hungary,

represents the Hungarian Educational Research Association (HERA); and Joe O'Hara, Ireland, represents the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI).

Third, we have a group of former and current secretaries general and convenors' representatives. Martin Lawn, UK, represents one of the founders of EERA and was the first secretary general. Edwin Keiner, Germany, was the first convenors' representative on the EERA Council from 2003 to 2006. Ian Grosvenor, UK, and Marit Honerød Hoveid, Norway, succeeded in this function, and both served as secretaries general later – Hoveid serves until 2016. Maria Pacheco Figueiredo, Portugal, is the current convenors' representative on the EERA Council.

Fourth, there is a group of network convenors represented in this issue. Palle Rasmussen, Denmark, coordinated the EERA network on policy studies and politics of education in the years 2009-2012. Fiona Hallett, UK, has been, and Patricia Fidalgo, Portugal, currently is the link convenor of the Emerging Researchers' Group of EERA. Last, but not least, Susann Hofbauer, Germany, and Natasha MacNab, UK, contributed to the special issue as co-authors without a current official function in EERA, but with significant experience regarding the communicative space of EERA, ECER and the networks. Against this background we also would like to shed light – beyond organisational, financial, administrative, theoretical and methodological factors and scientific quality issues – on the many people in different functions who continuously and voluntarily are ready and willing to contribute to an exciting enterprise of communication and understanding, reflection and development of educational research of and in Europe as a place we all are part of without knowing what and how this place might be. The fact that EERA is being run and organised by highly diverse scholars in many respects means that it is a multifaceted entity which can be viewed in various perspectives.

EERA and its elements and initiatives, for example, could be seen (1) from an organisational sociology viewpoint as an association of associations, but also (2) as a place for scholars, which do not necessarily represent the array of national educational research, but also (3) as a promise hoping that a temporarily experienced common ground could become a steady ground. To some extent it could be argued that trust is the basement on which 'truth' is built up. EERA and ECER could be seen (4) as a social merger of different research cultures, and also as an implicit hierarchy of these cultures, or (5) as a career centre or (6) as a platform for meeting, for coordination, cooperation and competition – also regarding the acquisition of research projects and funds. They also could be seen (7) as a playground for experiencing internationalisation and exercising in different languages (which might be also of profit at home) or (8) as a temporarily protected island, a refuge, to which scholars, usually working under high managerial and market pressure, can escape at least once a year in order to recharge the intellectual batteries. They, additionally, but not finally, could be seen (9) as an experimental field of experiencing multiple forms and processes of diversity, diversification and integration, which contribute to an emerging borderlessness. (Keiner & Hofbauer, this issue)

This also means that, after 20 years, EERA is old enough to be awarded a special issue and to be celebrated at ECER 2014 in Porto. But, at the same time, EERA is too young, too dynamic, and, to some extent, not mature and saturated enough as an academic organisation to be investigated systematically and comprehensively. Therefore, this special issue serves as a patchwork, which – together with authors and editors – needs the observer, the reader, to co-construct a shared past and future. EERA, as well as research on EERA, will remain a challenging enterprise for the future, which, finally, leads us to offer cordial congratulations and best wishes – traditionally in the old Latin form: AD MULTOS ANNOS!!

### Notes

- [1] The EERA Constitution, §4, states that 'national, regional or supra-regional corporation engaged in general educational research, if domiciled in Europe, may become a member'; thus, SERAs are not admitted as members today.
- [2] The inclusion of more research associations, especially from Eastern European countries, has been significant over the last 20 years.

- [3] The growth of networks can be argued to have been developed in terms of ‘a broadly defined, unrestricted concept of educational research’.

## References

- Gretler, A. (2007). The International Social Organisation of Educational Research in Europe: reviewing the European Educational Research Association as an example – facts and questions, *European Educational Research Journal*, 6(2), 174-187. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/eeerj.2007.6.2.174>

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